

Star Wars: Jade's Fire

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Author's Notes: This story will pull heavily on Star Wars books and what I think is coming in Episodes II & III. All the Buffy-related stuff is basically seasons 1-3.

S T A R W A R S

Jade's Fire

> <p> I've never liked babysitting. I'm a warrior, damn it, why do I get stuck on some mud ball watching a brat like Anakin Skywalker? I'd almost rather be in the Clone Wars, despite my rather vehement and out-voiced opposition to it. Either way my nights were filled with endless streams of nightmares, way too real to be anything but. Sometimes they were of places and people I'd never seen, sometimes friends. Sometimes even me. Those were always the least clear. You know what they say; prophecy's a bitch.<p>

Oh, by the way - the name's Ketel Jaden, but everybody calls me Jade.

Well, Skywalker wanted to go to a bar. I agreed, figuring I could watch him from a distance and not have to interact with him in the least. Besides, I hadn't had a drink in hours, and I'm Corellian. Some stereotypes are true.

We hadn't been in there for twenty minutes when the shouting began. Skywalker had somehow wheedled his way into a big-time game of sabacc. From the looks of it, he'd been doing pretty well - too well. And apparently someone else had noticed that, too.

"That's enough," said a large, dangerous looking man, placing himself between Skywalker and his accuser. His strong frame and rugged face - combined with his right hand subtly drawing nearer his blaster - marked him as experienced in this kind of thing. Actually, toss on an eye patch or something, and he'd have looked quite the pirate. "I suggest you just take your winnings and go, now."

Slowly, I made my way toward them. "Let it go, Skywalker," I said when I saw him pull out his light saber. I drew mine as well. Obi-Wan had warned me about Skywalker's temper since his mother had died.

"I don't think so," he said, igniting the blade and swinging at the man. I jumped forward, my leg cutting behind his and yanking him to the ground before his saber could connect. Without missing a beat, he leapt back to his feet, now facing me. "I've had enough of you. All of you! Damn Jedi, always interfere." I heard his thought nearly as clearly as his words: "Because of you my mother is dead!"

"Yeah, we're real annoying that way," I muttered, ignoring the last part for the time being - I didn't see us having a logical debate just then - as we began circling each other. This would not be pretty, I could tell. He charged at me, yelling angrily, but I sidestepped and a well-placed kick sent him flying out the door. I followed, and the fight resumed, both of us striking and blocking faster than most of the spectators could follow. Some were cheering and many were placing bets. At the time I wasn't even sure whom I'd bet on.

I missed an opening, but he didn't. He whirled around, his light saber coming up to firmly implant itself in my belly. I was surprised, but still focused. I gathered the heat from his saber as best I could, pulling it into me then refocusing it at him, pushing him nearly twenty feet back into the road. Before I blacked out, I saw a speeder fly by, hitting him at full speed.

* * *

> <p> I woke up to a scream. After a moment, I realized that despite the incredible pain in my stomach, it had not been my own. I didn't know where I was, but it was someone's bed, and there was something going on outside in the main room. Gritting my teeth, I got up to go see what.<p>

When I got there, Skywalker had the man I'd saved in the bar - Booster Terrik, I vaguely remembered him introducing himself as when he pulled me into his home semi-conscious - in a tight Force grip and his light saber on its smallest setting sticking into Booster's eye. "Let him down," I said as forcefully as I could manage, drawing and igniting my light saber.

He turned to me, a sneer on his face, but he let Booster go as he reset his light saber to the normal length. Our eyes locked as we judged each other's fighting status. He knew I'd be sluggish from the gut-wound he'd inflicted, and I could see he was favoring his left

leg, and his left arm was practically dead weight. Not much better than me, but I'd kind of been hoping he'd be dead.

And while we stood scanning each other for weaknesses, she walked in. I'd like to say it was love at first sight, but at the moment I was in full battle mode, literally seeing in black and white. All I saw was an uninjured Jedi, and I hoped she was on my side.

Apparently she hadn't been expecting this scene when she walked in. She hurriedly drew her light saber, pointing it at Skywalker. I breathed a sigh of relief as he slowly made his way out. I was surprised he didn't even throw an "I'll be back," or "You'll pay for this," at us.

After he left, I took the time to look her over. She was small, delicate looking, almost two heads shorter than me. She wore her long, dark red hair back in a ponytail. The fiery quality of her hair perfectly countered her icy blue eyes, which glowed with inner warmth. "I'm Nira," she stated, rolling her eyes at my appraisal of her. "I suppose you're Jade."

"That's right," my voice shifting into 'suave' mode despite the fact I was still in immense pain. I was sure being in bed had made my blond hair sufficiently "mussed", and my dark green eyes were always ready to do their thing.

The change did not go unnoticed. "Well, I'm supposed to be your student now. My Master died in the clone wars," she said sadly, though her annoyance at being stuck with a Jedi like me was still evident.

"My condolences," I said solemnly. Having so recently lost my own Master, I really could sympathize with her. At least I'd had time to finish my training before losing Master C'Baath to that silly "Outbound Flight Project". Technically, he wasn't presumed dead, but I knew he was. He was practically my father, since I'd been given to him as a baby to be trained. I knew he was dead. I could feel it. "If you don't mind," I continued, "I should be getting back to bed." I began walking back to where Booster had had me before.

"I better change those bandages," Booster said, coming to follow me.

"I'll do it," Nira said, stopping him. At my questioning look, she continued, "I have moderate healing skills. It'll make your recovery a little faster, at least."

"Thank you," I said, nodding to her. Secretly, I was thinking it would be much easier to seduce her with a bed so accessible. My injury hurt, but that would be easily forgotten.

She must of heard my thoughts, or at least sensed my intentions, because when she walked past me in the room she jabbed me hard in the gut with her elbow, sending me to the floor gasping in pain. "Oops," she said lightly. "Sorry."

"No problem," I muttered.

* * *

> <p> A few days later, we were in space aboard my ship, the Angel. We were headed for parts unknown. Apparently, after her experience in the Clone Wars, she was as disgusted with the Jedi and the galaxy in general as I was. I was surprised she was willing to go off with me, considering the only reason she was with me was because those same Jedi that sent her to the front lines in the first place had assigned her to me. We were getting along amiably enough though.<p>

"Why were you sent to the Clone Wars anyway? I mean, you're a healer, right?" I asked her. We sat in the cockpit just watching hyperspace go by, me in the pilot's seat and her in the co-pilot's.

"I don't know. They say it's because we're dealing with clones," she said, rolling her eyes at the word. "But I don't know. Supposedly, since we can't match their numbers, we have to send our most skilled. Which means Jedi. And we still need to send as many as possible, which means all of us. Except you for some reason."

I chuckled. "Prophecy's my gift," I told her. "They probably don't want me running around in the middle of a war telling everyone that the galaxy is doomed. Think of the desertions."

She almost smiled but quickly caught herself. "Maybe we'd all have been better off."

"Maybe," I said, nodding. I reached out and touched her shoulder. "Or maybe the clones would be running things now."

"Yeah," she whispered. "Master Gilen was killed by clones. Sith clones. He told me to run right before he was struck down, and I did. Just barely escaped." She shook her head in disgust. "They didn't even tell us there might be any Sith beforehand, but now they tell us that some Sith were discovered just ten years ago."

"Intentional disinformation," I said ruefully. "Same thing with my Master. The Jedi Council wanted to do something good to offset the war, so they set up the Outbound Flight Project with the Republic. Six Jedi Masters, all on one ship going off into the Unknown Regions. It's like shooting a womprat in a plast-crate."

Her face changed slightly then, her eyes softened. I guess she saw in me someone who understood, more or less. Slowly, she leaned toward me and I did likewise. We met in the middle with the sweetest kiss in my life. Moments later, we were in my cabin.

And it happened. I don't mean sex, well, yeah, we had sex, as had been my objective since we met, butâ€¦ it was different. It sounds lame and sappy, but I don't think you can really understand it until it happens. Actually, I didn't for some time after. Suddenly this beautiful woman, who had only just become my latest conquest, had beaten me. We were inside each other -- mind, body, and soul. I'd been with Jedi women before, and that could be intense, but this was way beyond even that. It was peace and perfection. I really can't describe it beyond that.

* * *

> <p> Almost seven years passed, the biggest difficulty of that time

being our daughter, Mara, born a little less than a year after Nira and I first got together. We hid away on a small dirt-ball of a world, somewhere on the fringe of the Outer Rim where no one would ever even bother to look for anyone. We knew the Emperor was still looking for us, probably even harder than he was for other Jedi, and this was one of the nicer places in the galaxy to disappear. It wasn't exactly everything we wanted in a home, but it was fairly decent. There was little crime, adequate schools for Mara, and absolutely no Imperial presence whatsoever.<p>

We lived in a small house, just two bedrooms, though the main room was pretty spacious, containing just a little couch and a holocomm. It was comfortable, though, and we had few complaints after living there for six years. We were happy.

I answered the door, expecting another annoying door-to-door salesman - we may have been happy, but we still really needed to move to a more civilized world. Ready to roll my eyes and tell the guy what he could do with his product, I opened the door - and felt fear grip me. An old friend, Vyn Narcassan, stood there looking as rigid and focused as ever. We'd known each other in the old days; he was the Republic's number one intelligence agent. "How did you find me?" I asked.

"It wasn't that hard," Vyn answered cryptically. "I need your help."

"I'm not in the business anymore," moving to shut the door on him.

"We can take him out," he said. That stopped me. "He's on Carida. He's vulnerable."

"Carida? Are you nuts? That's the new Imperial Academy, not exactly what I'd call vulnerable!"

"It's a new facility. They haven't had time to iron out the security protocols, and they haven't even moved many troops there yet," he explained. "The Emperor has his usual entourage - but that's all." His face softened a little, which made mine as well. I knew the Empire had killed his wife, left him in hiding the same as Nira, Mara, and me. "Look, we'd never get into Coruscant - this is our chance! If we can take him out, the Empire will collapse. Without him, in a week there'll be a dozen factions fighting for control, and the Republic can at least be one of them. We have to do this. And I need you. You think about it. I'll be back in thirty-six hours. We take off then, with or without you." He turned and walked off, leaving me staring silently in the doorway.

Of course, I went straight to Nira. And of course, she totally disapproved. "Are you nuts? It's a trap! You're not going," she said with finality.

"You don't know that!" I countered.

"Maybe not, but don't you? You're the prophet. What do you see?"

"Iâ€¦I'm not sure. It's possible," I conceded quietly.

"Possible? Try likely! You want to leave me and Mara for what will likely be the death of you?" she asked angrily. I knew she was just concerned, and she certainly had every right to be.

"But this is our chance, Nira. He'll never stop. We both know that! If we can pull this off, then it's over. No more hiding! We can move off this dust-ball. Mara can go to a decent school like she deserves. You both deserve so much better than this," I told her.

"It's not your fault. I'm a Jedi too remember? He wants us both."

"I know, but Vader doesn't have it in for you. Look - I have to do this. I didn't bring this to you for permission. Just for your blessing."

"Well you're not getting it," she said, turning away from me. She hesitated. "Promise you'll be careful."

"I promise."

And that was that. We didn't speak again, even the next day before I left. I tried to explain things to Mara, but apparently Nira already had, in my favor even. She was still angry with me, but she understood at least. Before we took off, I touched them both with the Force, telling them how much I loved them.

* * *

> <p> We, being Vyn, myself, and four other old Intelligence agents, arrived on Carida without incident; apparently the pass codes had been valid after all. I could sense the Emperor easily since we entered the system, and had all my energies focused on hiding myself from him.<p>

Shortly after disembarking the ship, we stepped right into Palpatine's carefully laid trap. Dressed as Imperial technicians, we were supposed to be able to walk right into the primary building. We didn't even get close. In the middle of the landing area, which was suspiciously empty aside from our own shuttle and a small single-man craft a few meters away, blasters began firing at us from all directions.

My light saber was out just as the others drew their blasters and began falling back toward the ship for cover. I managed to deflect the more accurate bolts, keeping everyone safe until we got under the ship. I could hear Nira's "I told you so" in my head even as I felt like saying it to Vyn. But there was no time for recriminations, and we were all experienced enough to know that. "You guys," I said, "get back in the ship and get out of here. You can't do any good."

"And what are you going to do?" one of them asked.

"Whatever it takes," I answered. With that, I began sprinting toward the main building where I knew Palpatine was waiting, slowing only to block volleys of blaster fire. The others were doing a decent job with the cover fire, though, and I made it across the pad and was inside in less than thirty seconds.

Inside, there was nobody. The shooters had been on the roof, but now

no one even tried to stop me. Walking briskly, I went in search for the Emperor. I could sense him, but the building was practically a maze.

Finally, I reached him. As my eyes found his ancient, decrepit face, hatred flowed through me. I knew it was probably him influencing me, but at that moment I didn't care, and embraced it fully. My family would not be safe until that monster had been destroyed. "Well, I'm here, Palpy," I said. I pointed my light saber at him. "So let's get this over with. You've wanted me, now you've got me."

He laughed. I'd sort of expected that, or a snort of disgust or something, but not this kind of maniacal, evil, penetrating laugh. I didn't think the old man had a jovial bone in his body, but this was a real laugh. After a few seconds, he stopped, his wrinkled face still sneering at me. "Silly boy," he said. "This was never about you."

And just then, I felt it. It was like the right side of my brain suddenly turned to ice and violently tore itself from my cranium. It chilled my soul with fear and loneliness. Instantly I knew the cause and turned, running as fast as I could to the landing pad, the Emperor completely forgotten. Instinctively, I found my way through the previously maze-like hallways. The shuttle we'd landed in was gone, so I took the smaller craft. It was surprisingly easy to steal - the Emperor had probably been planning on my taking it. I skipped preflight, recklessly taking off, letting the Force guide me past automated defenses, and was in hyperspace as soon as the planet's gravity well was cleared.

The hyperdrive disengaged just short of the planet. The comm instantly came to life. "Unidentified vessel, this is Akathla control! You have entered the system on an illegal vector, turn away and send -" The message ended suddenly when I tapped the laser controls, vaporizing the spaceport's only defenses and its single comm antennae.

I landed, jumped out of the ship, and resumed my sprint toward home. When I got there, the door was open, stopping me in my tracks. Cautiously, I approached, my eyes carefully examining the insides. What I found made the hair on my neck stand up and my muscles tense.

Nira lay lazily on the couch looking directly at me. When our eyes met, she smiled, though it failed to breach the suddenly icy depths of her eyes. "Hello, lover," she said sensuously - a bitter mockery of how I'd been when we first met.

"Where's Mara?" I asked, my voice as menacing as I could manage speaking to the woman I loved more than my own life.

"Gone. Vader was here earlier, picked her up." She stood, slowly sauntering toward me. "Nice guy. Unfortunately he was in a hurry, and we didn't have time for me to check out his 'hardware'."

"Who are you?" I asked, my voice cracking.

She stopped her approach, standing right up to me. Just a breath away from me, she whispered, "Why, Jade, I'm your wife." Her hands began wandering around my chest. "Vader wanted me to give you a message."

Suddenly she whirled around, her right hand coming up to backhand me right on the jaw.

I kept my footing, and after a moment brought my head back up to stare at what my wife had become. "This isn't you, Nira," I whispered, closing my eyes.

"You'd like to believe that, wouldn't you? But it is! I never loved you; nobody could ever love you. Now fight back!" She shouted, punching me in exactly the same spot again. Again, I managed to refuse to respond. "Fight!"

She punched again, and something in me just snapped, letting the floodgates on my anger release. I pushed her, throwing her small body to the floor. She giggled as she hopped to her feet. "Well, that was kinda immature." At the same instant, we both drew our light sabers.

We fought for a while, but my heart wasn't in it. The longer it went on, the less convinced I was that I could end it, and as a result I passed up many openings. She exploited my hesitations, throwing me to the floor as she disarmed me. "Well, that's everything," she said, stalking closer, her light saber's point aimed directly at my head. "No weapon. No Mara," she grinned, "No Nira. No hope. Take all that away, and what's left?"

No Nira? Had she said that? It kept echoing in my mind. If she could admit that, for some reason it made it possible for me, too. To see this creature for what she was - an evil to be stopped. One that I had to stop. As she pulled her saber back to strike the final blow, I called mine back to me and blocked it. With this new resolve, I responded, "Me." Pushing with all my strength, I threw her away from me as I stood.

The fight resumed, but I now had the upper hand. I was the more experienced warrior, and I was ready to sacrifice everything - and something deep in the pit of my stomach told me that I would have to. At last, I saw my opening, did a quick one-eighty and pulled my light saber up - right into her gut. I heard her gasp just before I felt the change. My eyes widened in horror as I pulled back my saber, disengaging it and dropping it to the ground. I turned to see Nira fallen against the wall on her knees, her eyes full of confusion as she gasped for breath.

"Nira?" I questioned hesitantly, kneeling in front of her. Looking into her eyes, I knew it was she. The Emperor's control must have faltered when I'd stabbed her.

"Jade? I don't - oh, no. Oh, blazes, no." She was still struggling to breathe.

"Don't worry, I'll get you to a hospital," I said, eyeing her for the easiest way to move her without doing additional damage. "You'll be fine." I tried to sound like I was sure of it.

"No," she whispered, her eyes drifting. "I won't be."

"Look at me!" I shouted, panicked. I didn't want her losing focus. When she did, I continued, "I survived a gut-wound, so will you, now just focus on healing it-"

"No!" she interrupted. "Don't you get it? I didn't escape the clone wars! He captured me, Jade; he broke me! I can't go on living knowing that. Being his puppet. I just can't. I'm glad you did this, Jade. You've set me free."

Tears began rolling down my cheeks. "Then it's over. He's won."

Nira reached out, grabbing my tunic and taking me by surprise. "No! It's not over, it's never over!" She shuddered in pain, but quickly caught herself. "Mara. Promise me you'll help Mara. Promise me!"

"I promise," I whispered. She fell back against the wall, her body shuddering with every breath. I eyed my light saber, and then looked back at her, my heart crumbling. I leaned toward her, kissing her fervently. "I love you."

"I love you, too," she returned.

I put my hands on her cheeks, wiping her tears away with my thumbs. "Close your eyes," I whispered, my voice cracking for the second time that day.

"No, I-"

"Shh," I quieted her protests. Reluctantly, she complied. I picked up my light saber, igniting it. Closing my eyes, I swung it clean through her neck. Her body evaporated before I'd even completed the stroke. My own tears flowing unchecked, I kneeled, gently touching her empty clothes. Slowly, I stood and walked to the landing pad, this time taking my own ship. Next stop Coruscant, and Mara.

* * *

> <p>When I arrived, I was once again trying to fully cloak myself in the Force. I didn't know if it worked or not, but it kept my mind occupied, which was a big plus at the time.<p>

I managed to walk right up the Emperor's throne room, which was enough to tell me that my technique had definitely failed and he knew I was there. But I didn't care. I had a mission, and I would complete it. Nira and I always fulfill our promises to each other.

Vader met me first. "It's been a long time, Jade," came his new metallic voice. He was right in front of me, red light saber drawn and in position. "I've been waiting for this moment. Vengeance can be so sweet."

"Tell me about it," I said, drawing my light saber as I charged him. The fight was even this time; I could feel it. Skywalker had been stronger than me in the Force, but in the accident that turned him into the gnarled figure of Darth Vader, he'd lost a lot of himself, and with it at least some of his power. And the fact that I was pissed off and willing to use it didn't hurt, either.

I managed to kick him to the ground, but as I prepared the final blow, my light saber flew from my hand and across the room. "Enough," came the Emperor's voice. Turning away from Vader, I saw Palpatine sitting on his throne, watching us in distaste. He wasn't happy that

I'd managed to beat his little stooge. "So," he continued, "You have defeated my right hand man. Congratulations. Now, however, I would like to introduce you to my left hand."

He waved a bony hand and the door beside him opened. Out stepped a small redheaded girl. Mara. My heart screamed; I was too late. In her little hand was a blaster, one of those little pocket-blaster types. It was probably the only kind she could hold. The look in her eye was all too familiar, Nira had had it only hours before. Her intent was also familiar - she wanted me dead.

"Do it," the Emperor commanded her. "Kill him."

"Yes, Master," she responded. Her tiny finger pulled back on the trigger, the blaster bolt instantly lancing out at me.

Just in front of me, however, its path was intersected by my light saber. Looking over my blades' glow, I looked into my daughter's green eyes, the one part of her I identified as definitely coming from me. "Sleep," I whispered, using the same trick I had with her on so many sleepless nights. She collapsed bonelessly. Casting a last look of hate at the Emperor, I shifted my Force grip on my saber - making it slice right through me.

* * *

> <p>I don't know how much later I woke up. It felt like forever, but then, I hadn't expected to ever wake up. Hadn't I killed myself to stop Mara from having to? What in blazes had gone wrong? I'd chopped myself in half; there was no way I should have been able to survive.<p>

I was strapped to a table. Reaching out with the Force, I noticed that I couldn't. I felt blind, crippled. Not only couldn't I move any part of my body or feel the Force, all I could see was what I assumed were torture implements hanging from a solid block above me. This was not good.

"Ah, I see you're awake."

"Oh, blazes," I remember thinking. However, I said, "Only you would bring a guy back from the dead just to kill him again, Palpy."

He chuckled. "There's more to it than that. You see I had been prepared to keep you if I felt the need. And after the way you handled yourself in my throne room earlier, I felt it. So, when you died, I pushed your soul into this nice, new clone body. You should thank me. You're twenty-one again."

"Gee, really? Why don't you go use that on yourself, you could use the facelift more than me," I said.

"Actually, I jump into a new body quite often. The human body is so frail. It simply can't handle all the power that I possess. But enough about me. You're probably wondering why you can't feel the Force."

"I'm not an idiot, Palpy. I know what ysalamiri are." I rolled my eyes, though I doubt he could see that.

"I see," he said after a moment. Apparently he'd been hoping to taunt me some more about that. "Well, then, right to the torture."

And that's how it went for weeks, possibly months. Not always physical torture - at least not to me. Sometimes he'd show me holos of what he'd done to Mara. That's when I really wanted to kill him.

He'd killed me, and brought me back, five times before I decided it was time to go. Either escape, or die yet again trying. I was back on the cold metal slab I'd first awakened on, shackles on my wrists, ankles, and chest. I began a Jedi calming technique - its use was limited without the Force, but it still more or less worked. My heart slowed, and I could feel my body numbing. When it was complete, I poured my will, all my personal Force energy that I could just barely feel, into my feet, pushing them straight and breaking my ankles. Slowly, I managed to work my feet out of their shackles, sighing in relief when my heel just barely fit at the odd angle I knew would hurt a whole lot later.

Once free, I pulled my knees back and kicked up at the hopefully not solid block above me. I'd noticed Palpatine always stayed a ways away from me and was hoping it was because the ysalamiri were centered right on me. Thankfully, I was right. My legs broke through. With a little work, one ysalamiri was sitting right on my stomach, and with a little more, I squeezed it to death with my feet. Instantly, I felt the Force flow through me. With it, I quickly undid the rest of my shackles and ran through a serious pain-detering exercise. When I was ready, I got to my feet.

It wasn't hard to find the Emperor, and this time I didn't bother trying to hide myself. He was in a dining room with some other Imperial higher-ups, including Vader. "Well, well, look who's up and around," he said, not particularly interested. Vader started to stand, but Palpatine waved him back. "No need for you just now, Lord Vader."

"I have an offer to make," I said.

"I thought so. Well, spit it out."

"I'll give you Mara," I said, refusing to let my voice catch. "Free and clear. She'll serve you loyally. In exchange, you will not mistreat her in any way. If you do, so help meâ€¦" I let the threat hang.

"If you do this, that's it. I no longer want you; you're far too much of a hassle. You'll die, permanently. You won't be able to do anything to me," he said, shaking his head. He thought I was delirious, but I'd never been more clear-headed.

"If you kill me and you touch her, I'll come back more powerful than you could possibly imagine." It was not an idle threat.

Looking into my eyes, he knew it, too. "Very well. You make Mara Jade my loyal servant, and you both are free."

And so I did it. I wiped her memory, everything that she had been in her first six years of life. Made it so all she would know is what

the Emperor told her, and something told me he wouldn't betray the trust I'd given him. He'd let her serve him of her own accord; he wouldn't try to twist her to his way of thinking.

"I'm finished," I whispered, knowing I'd done the right thing but still having trouble believing it. I turned to look at the Emperor, but instead just barely caught the sight of Vader's red light saber before it cut through my neck.

* * *

> <p>I stood at the bottom of the Lerfk Hill. It had been one of my and Nira's favorite spots on Akathla. Looking up, I saw her familiar figure against the pink sky of sunset. Slowly, I walked up behind her, putting my arms around her middle. She leaned back against me and I hugged her close. "How'd you find me?" she asked quietly.<p>

"If I was blind, I could see you," I responded. I kissed the top of her head. "I've missed you."

"Have I been gone?"

"Yes," I nearly sobbed. "Don't ever leave me again."

"I won't."

"Promise me."

She looked up at me, smiling. "I promise," she whispered, kissing me lightly. "I'll never leave." Her eyes twinkled with mischief. "Not even if you kill me."

My eyes jumped open as I fell forward, her familiar weight suddenly gone as the dream shattered into reality. I caught myself on my arms, but my body felt awkward and I struggled to stay up as I retched.

"About time you woke up," came a deep voice from the darkness that surrounded me. Instantly alert, or at least more alert, I looked up into a pair of glowing red eyes. "I've been waiting for you, Jade," he continued. He stepped forward into the pale light from the equipment behind me, and I could see he had blue skin to go with those eyes. "I am Grand Admiral Thrawn. And I have a job for you."

My only thought was, "why can't I just stay dead?"

To be continuedâ€¦|

End
file.